

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PSC ISSUES ANNUAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORT TO LEGISLATURE

LINCOLN – The Nebraska Public Service Commission will ask the Legislature in 2004 to bring the providers of wireless telephone services under the same service and billing standards that other telecommunications companies must meet.

The Commission said in its Annual Report on Telecommunications that it intends to seek legislative approval for jurisdiction over wireless companies providing service to Nebraska residents. Only land-based or wireline telecommunications companies are regulated under the auspices of the Public Service Commission (PSC).

In a prefacing letter to the report, Commission Chair Anne Boyle of Omaha said, “The Commission intends to request enabling authority to bring wireless communications providers under the same service and billing standards mandated for companies offering traditional wireline telecommunications in the next session of the Legislature. As the wireless industry grows and users become more dependent on them, it is important that we ensure dependable service and accurate billing. Other states have or are considering similar actions.”

Four years ago, wireless carriers reached one-third of the total access lines in Nebraska and the gap between the two types of carriers has been shrinking since that time. This year, wireless access lines total 744,185, a growth of seven percent over the end of 2002, while wireline usage has shrunk to 1,112,182 lines, a drop of 31,929. Boyle said the decline of wireline usage is nearly four times greater than the previous year. The report covers the Commission’s fiscal year from July 1, 2002, of the preceding year to June 30, 2003.

Boyle said the Nebraska PSC has been at the forefront of attempts to improve the performance of wireless carriers. “The Nebraska Commission was the leader in developing a list of ‘Wireless Best Practices’, which was passed by the National Association of Regulatory Commissioners” at its July meeting this year. Some of those recommendations were adopted in a voluntary code publicized by wireless carriers in September, but the national regulatory association “does not fully support the wireless companies’ effort as the carriers failed to address all matters contained in the Best Practices document,” Boyle said.

“Furthermore,” she said, “voluntary efforts do not ensure adequate consumer protection.”

The number of complaints to the Commission by wireless consumers has remained steady from the previous year. Due to a drop in wireline complaints during the same period, wireless complaints rose from 15.4 percent of the Commission's total in 2002 to 20 percent in 2003.

Boyle said the Commission continues to work with wireless companies on other issues such as implementation of E911. Thirty-one of Nebraska's 93 counties have now implemented Phase I of the state's E911 program including 17 during the past year. Applications have been made for an additional eight counties since June 30.

The Nebraska Commission also has taken a leadership role nationally in support of local number portability, which enables wireless, and in some rate centers wireline, customers to retain their telephone number even though they may choose to change providers. Boyle said, "In addition to reducing the cost to consumers by avoiding changing telephone numbers, local number portability is a key ingredient in preservation of Nebraska's numbering resources, thereby extending the life of Nebraska's two area codes (308 and 402)."

Boyle said, "Many wireless carriers continue to oppose portability. Barring any court or congressional action to delay, November 24 has been mandated as the implementation date set by the Federal Communications Commission."

Four years ago, the PSC received a forecast that the 402 area code would be exhausted by the fourth quarter of 2002. That forecast has now been extended to the first quarter of 2005. Boyle observed, "The Nebraska Commission has been, and will continue to be, at the forefront in preserving the integrity of the 308 and 402 area codes, Local number portability, rate center consolidation, and number pooling play significant roles in these conservation efforts."

Details on these and other telecommunications issues are contained in the report of about 75 pages, which was filed September 24, 2003, prior to its September 30 deadline. The public may access the complete report on the PSC's website: www.psc.state.ne.us.

#

Send to: All